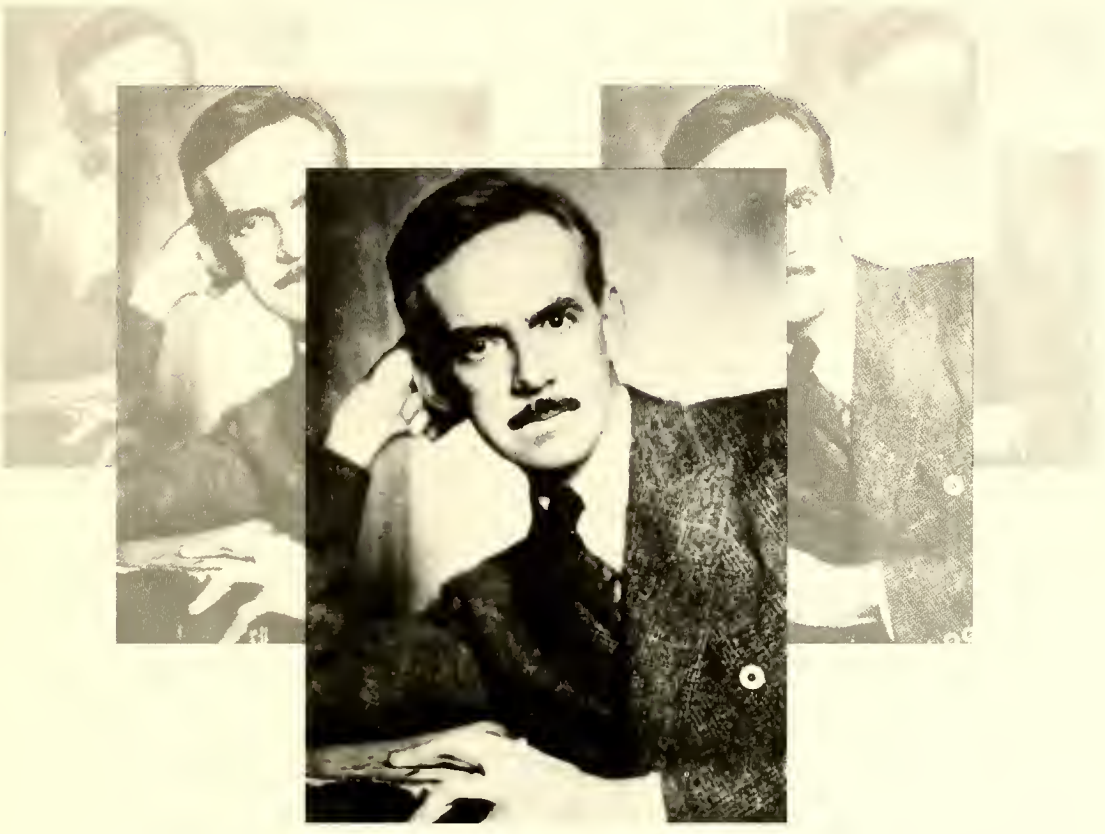
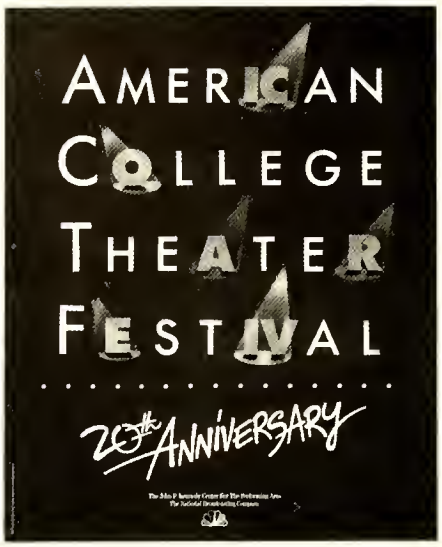
A TOUCH OF THE POET



EUGENE O'NEILL
1888–1953
American Playwright

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Theatre
Taylor Building
Greensboro, North Carolina 27412-5001
USA



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20th Anniversary

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The Southeastern Theatre Conference has provided assistance for the participation of *A Touch of the Poet* in ACTF XX.

UNCG Theatre Presents

Eugene O'Neill's

A Touch of the Poet

November 4-8, 1987
Taylor Building Theatre

A Commemorative Production
Celebrating the Centennial of the Playwright's Birth

Directed by Betty Jean Jones
Set Designed by Lang Reynolds
Costumes Designed by Adele Cantor
Lighting Designed by G. Anderson Sharp
Stage Managed by George W. Bellah III

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Eugene O'Neill's *A Touch of the Poet* and The Emergence of the "New World" Individual

by Ronald R. Miller, Ph.D.

Ronald R. Miller is a theatre professor at Western Maryland College. His research speciality is American theatre and drama, with a particular interest in the plays of Eugene O'Neill. He recently completed a book-length study entitled *Eugene O'Neill's Vision of American History: A Study of the Cycle Plays.*

A Touch of the Poet was conceived by Eugene O'Neill in 1935 as the first of a cycle of plays which was to dramatize the history of a fictional American family, the Harfords of Massachusetts, from the Presidency of Andrew Jackson to that of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a period of just over a century. It appears that when the playwright first contemplated the project, he planned a series of four plays, describing the careers and destinies of four brothers during the second half of the nineteenth century. O'Neill seems to have conceived of the careers of the Harford brothers — clipper ship captain, railroad magnate, United States Senator and gambler — as representative of the transformations in economic, social and political life taking place during the American "Gilded Age."

Soon after he began preliminary work on this idea, however, O'Neill envisioned yet another play, which would describe the marriage of the parents of the Harford brothers: Simon, the son of a prominent Boston trader and shipbuilder, and Sara, daughter of Irish immigrants. This play he at first entitled "The Hair of the Dog" but eventually called *A Touch of the Poet*. This in turn led to a sequel, *More Stately Mansions*, which treated the history of the family after the death of Sara's father, the innkeeper Cornelius Melody, the character on whom *A Touch of the Poet* was eventually to focus. Later in his work on the project, O'Neill would consider adding as many as four new plays to the beginning of the cycle, as well as a final play carrying the action forward to 1932. At one point in his thinking, he planned a cycle of eleven plays, beginning with the Battle of Bunker Hill and concluding in the Great Depression, some one and a half centuries later.

Not surprisingly, O'Neill regarded this project as the most ambitious of a career which had already produced dramas of unusual dimension, among them the nine-act *Strange Interlude* and the trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra*. It is clear from his correspondence about the cycle that he thought it to be an idea without precedent in world drama. The uniqueness of the planned work was due in part to its projected length, its continuity of theme, and its breadth of vision. Perhaps more significantly, however, O'Neill's project would have been the first major cycle of plays devoted to the interpretation of the history of a democratic nation. Such a subject required the development of new theatrical forms treating the careers of "democratic heroes." Consequently the playwright chose as the "protagonist" of the cycle an exemplary American family, one which reflected in the careers of its several members the changing quality of the American experience. Moreover, he sought to create a family of tragic stature, similar in passion and heroism to Shakespeare's Lancastrians or Aeschylus' House of Atreus.

This cycle, which O'Neill eventually entitled "A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed," may be thought of as comprising four parts. The first, which began as the single play "The Greed of the Meek" and eventually included four projected plays, was to treat the period 1775-1807. O'Neill destroyed most of the materials from this phase of the cycle, leaving only fragmentary notes. The second phase in the cycle begins in 1828, the year of Andrew Jackson's election, and continues into 1841. *A Touch of the Poet* and the longer work *More Stately Mansions* make up this part, which treats the period in American history sometimes characterized as "the Age of Jackson." In these plays, O'Neill concentrated on economic, social and political developments during this period and their impact upon personal identity and morality. The third phase of the cycle consists of scenarios and outlines from the four plays originally planned. Beginning in 1857, these treat the careers of the Harford brothers Ethan, Wolfe, Jonathan and Owen ("Honey"). The surviving materials from these plays indicate that O'Neill planned tragic destinies for each of these brothers. The two eldest, the clipper ship captain Ethan and the gambler Wolfe, were to have committed suicide. The youngest, Owen, would have resigned from the Senate in disgrace, the victim of a corruption scandal. Jonathan, the principal figure in the later plays, was to participate in the creation of the Transcontinental Railway, achieve domination in the American rail industry, purchase shipping lines to the Orient, and attempt to complete a system of railroads and shipping lines encircling the world. But his machinations in pursuit of this dream would result in the suicide of his wife and a final sense of spiritual failure. The last part of the cycle, conceived as a single play of twice normal length, was to focus on the rise of the motor industry during the first decades of the twentieth century. It would have described the decline of the Harford dynasty, and the moral and spiritual degeneration of their progeny.

O'Neill intended this family history to be read in part as symbolic of changes taking place in the history of the American people. He saw the tale of the Harfords as an epic tragedy, one in which the material and spiritual opportunities of the new nation would be lost to members of the family because of their inability to reconcile their yearnings for power and possession with their aspirations for spiritual and psychological "belonging." The playwright accordingly created crises in the careers of these characters which were representative of what he saw as crises in the national ethos. Each of the major dramatic figures in his epic vision of the American past — among them the Byronic soldier Cornelius Melody, the "Brahmin" gentlewoman Deborah Harford, her Thoreauesque son Simon, the nihilistic gambler Wolfe, the debauched but ingenuous politican "Honey" Harford — were "composites" of figures drawn from American history and popular culture.

When O'Neill began work in 1935 on the scenario for *A Touch of the Poet* (then entitled "The Hair of the Dog"), he intended to concentrate the action around four characters who exemplified different aspects of the New England ethos at the beginning of the "Age of Jackson." The playwright, like his contemporary, the Progressive historian Vernon Parrington, apparently regarded the election of Andrew Jackson as a kind of symbolic transition in American history, a transition which anticipated the creation of a genuinely American identity: a hybrid created through the mating of aspects of European Enlightenment and Romantic thought with the ethos of spiritual and economic freedom in America. O'Neill

chose as his central characters persons from two families — the Harfords, members of the Boston commercial aristocracy; and the Melodys, Irish immigrants and landowners on the outskirts of the city. Two of these characters were conceived of as representatives of European values: the innkeeper Cornelius Melody, father of Sara; and the gentlewoman Deborah Harford, mother of Simon. The two younger characters — Simon and Sara — in turn exemplify traits which would characterize a new generation of Americans in the era of Jacksonian democracy. The conflict which emerges in O'Neill's scenario concerns their intention to marry despite differences in their social, economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The consumation of their relationship symbolizes a transition from a system of social values based on European mores to one more appropriate to the democratic setting of the "New World."

While the final text of *A Touch of the Poet* focuses on the conflict between Melody and his daughter which results from this proposed marriage, the play O'Neill originally conceived would have given almost equal emphasis to a second plot, concerned with another domestic struggle for power, between the young Simon Harford and his mother. The conflict between Melody and Sara anticipates in scenario the lines of development taken in the completed play. Melody, a retired officer of the British army, decorated for his bravery in Wellington's Spanish campaigns against Napoleon, assumes aristocratic pretensions which deny his social and ethnic roots; he is the son of an Irish tavern-owner who had gotten his money through guile and deceit. If not an aristocrat by birth, however, Melody subscribes to the romantic notion of a "natural aristocracy," of which he deems himself a member due to his education (Trinity College in Dublin), his military background, and his poetic sensibility, which is self-consciously imitative of Byron. In the pragmatic world of American society, however, Melody's pretensions seem ludicrously at odds with the social and economic facts. Forced to resign from the British army due to sexual misconduct, he emigrated to America and purchased a roadside inn which has since fallen into disuse. Consequently he has accumulated substantial debts. Nor is his position enhanced by the fact that he is regarded by the patricians of Boston as belonging to a socially inferior race. Sara, by contrast, has adopted a set of values more in line with the "democratic" America heralded by Jackson's election. Despite the apparent differences between her social standing and that of Simon, she makes no effort to conceal her desire to marry him. Her sense of selfhood, while it shares with that of her father an element of personal pride, does not depend on the European romantic notion of a "natural aristocracy," but rests instead on the more democratic principle of personal equality.

In the final text of the play, the character Simon Harford exists only as an offstage presence, a figure of poetic sensibility confined to a chamber above the inn's dining room, where he is recuperating from an illness acquired while living alone in a cabin on Melody's land. In the scenario, however, he appears in several scenes: with his mother Deborah, who makes a brief appearance in the final version of the play, and with Sara. These scenes take place on the seacoast, in a shack where Simon has lived for some months in order to experience communion with nature. In this early version, the young man's evident similarities to the transcendentalists Thoreau and Emerson are emphasized. Simon admits that his desire to seek "belonging" in nature was prompted in part by a suggestion from the latter, with whom he was acquainted during his education at Harvard. Moreover, O'Neill's notes emphasize in Harford qualities of character which appear to be drawn from Emerson's Journals.

Simon is torn in the scenario between three alternatives: to remain on the seacoast, in pursuit of spiritual communion and self-realization, a quest which has so far frustrated him; to return to the "world of men" and enter business; or to find fulfillment in love. His mother, like Melody a romantic of the European school, seeks in her visits to the beach to affirm his dedication to inner searching. She wishes to live through him, in order to escape what she regards as the sordid pragmatism of New England existence. At the same time, she is deeply influenced by Puritan thought; in opposition to her romantic idealism, she believes herself to be essentially evil by nature. This aspect of her character emerges in her sometimes ruthless manipulations of her son.

Simon eventually chooses to consumate his affair with Sara on the beach. This event symbolizes his decision to renounce the influence of his mother, as well as his search for meaning through isolation in nature. In love, he finds the experience of communion which had evaded him in loneliness; he resolves, at the urging of Sara, to return to the world.

It appears that O'Neill intended the two lines of action in his original conception of *A Touch of the Poet* to describe two aspects of the emerging American identity in the Jacksonian era. In Sara, he saw social and economic pragmatism founded on a rejection of the idea of aristocracy, and a belief in personal equality and dignity. In Simon, he described the nascent impulse towards the transcendental, the tendency to repudiate economic opportunity in favor of spiritual insight. The marriage of Simon and Sara, implied in the ending of *A Touch of the Poet*, symbolizes the merging of these two aspects of America in the period which Vernon Parrington described as an age of "romantic revolution": the comingling of the spiritual and moral optimism of the Transcendentalists with the practical opportunism engendered by commercial expansion.

In the play which followed, *More Stately Mansions*, O'Neill would explore the tensions implicit in this union, as they emerge in the period of economic expansion and speculation surrounding the Panic of 1837. If *A Touch of the Poet* describes the creation of American identities appropriate to the beginning of an era of democratic liberty, its sequel describes the moral and psychological crises of character which arise from the struggle to reconcile the ethics of Transcendentalism with the economic opportunities of a growing America. But O'Neill's scenarios, outlines and notes from the cycle indicate that these plays represented only the beginning of what the playwright, following Parrington and other of the Progressive historians, saw as a larger cycle of American history: a progression from the pessimism of Puritan thought, through the democratic optimism of the romantic era, towards the new sense of alienation embracing industrial America in the twentieth century. O'Neill, who began his cycle during the Depression, shared with many of his contemporaries in the field of history a sense that the American experiment in democracy had failed. *A Touch of the Poet*, despite the pathos of its final moments, is an optimistic work, one which celebrates the emergence of a new sense of personal freedom. The works which followed are increasingly pessimistic in tone. They describe the degeneration of American ideals in a nation blind to the moral and spiritual consequences of abusing the freedom which democracy engenders.

Directing O'Neill: Continuity of Style

by Betty Jean Jones, Ph.D.

Betty Jean Jones is a theatre professor in the Department of Communication and Theatre at the University of N.C.-Greensboro. Her area of specialization is American theatre and drama with a particular interest in performance studies. She recently completed a book-length manuscript entitled *James A. Herne: Debunking the European Myth — The Rise of Realism in the American Drama.*

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (1888-1953) was a student of life and a man of letters — each trait inextricably linked to the other. Known as America's first great playwright, his plays show a consuming interest in the state of the human condition and its effect on the quality of life, the history of each generation, and prognosis of the future.

Praised by historians, critics and theorists as the American playwright who first treated drama as literature, O'Neill was awarded the gold medal for drama by the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the honorary degree of Litt. D. from Yale University, now the home of the O'Neill Collection, the largest single body of primary O'Neill documents. He was awarded four Pulitzer Prizes in drama: *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), his first full-length play; *Anna Christie* (1922); *Strange Interlude* (1928); and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (posthumously, 1957). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936, the first time an American playwright had been so honored.

Unlike some of his predecessors in the mid to late-nineteenth century, such as the short fiction writer Hamlin Garland, O'Neill's attention to literary aspects of the drama did not make him a less effective dramatist. He fashioned a dramatic language for the stage that moved the American drama maturely into the style known as realism (true-to-life representation of character, action and setting), while still experimenting with aspects of structure, manipulating form and content.

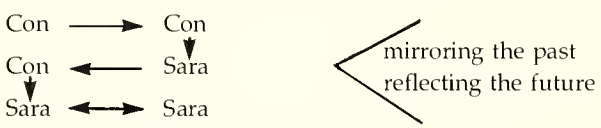
O'Neill wrote *A Touch of the Poet* over several years, circa 1935-1940. First published in 1946, the play did not have its first production until March 29, 1957 when the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm premiered the work. O'Neill's plays found a welcome home in Sweden — owing partially to the playwright's acknowledgement that August Strindberg had influenced his writing. Other O'Neill works premiered in Sweden include *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956), and *More Stately Mansions* (1962). The first Broadway production of *Poet* opened on October 12, 1958 at the Helen Hayes Theatre where the play ran for 248 performances.

Hailed by critics as one of the best plays of O'Neill's mature period, *Poet* ranks with the autobiographical *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (circa 1939-41) and the intense character study *The Iceman Cometh* (1939) as an example of O'Neill's dramatic vision at its best. *Poet's* realism is informed by romantic overtones that seek to present both the core of the individual spirit and the harsh realities that challenge, drive, and sometimes transform that spirit.

O'Neill presents Cornelius Melody's struggle within an America that is embarking upon a new age of growth and development. Set outside Boston in 1828, *Poet* presents the impact of a nation's transformation through character, action and setting. Melody's poetic soliloquies are not mere asides, but openings into the window of the character's soul, dramatically showing his search for meaning amidst the conflict of longing for otherworldliness, and the day-to-day struggle for power and possessions. This conflict manifests itself in rapid character transitions within the dialogue — a singular challenge for the most experienced of actors.

The quality of action is not merely contemplative. O'Neill provides at least four major moments of decisive physical action that undergird the psychological conflict, driving the play to its climax and conclusion. Three of these dramatic moments take place off-stage: the attack on the Harford lawyer Gadsby; the brawl at the Harford mansion, and a startling twist involving Major Melody's dueling pistols. The fourth is a climactic moment when Melody strikes Sara — a symbolic double attack, actually that can be read as a form of self-discipline. O'Neill ties these moments of physical action to progression of character, wrought in exacting detail.

The structural rhythms of the drama lead Sara Melody, Con's daughter, into confrontations with her father that are ultimately cyclical confrontations with herself, as noted in the diagram below:



O'Neill's penchant for expositional repetition becomes, in this play, a central dramatic device for illuminating and understanding a cycle of self-discovery through self-disillusionment. Indeed, *A Touch of the Poet* was to be one in a cycle of as many as eleven plays tracing the history of an Anglo-Irish family (Harford-Melody) over 100 years of life in America. O'Neill entitled the proposed cycle "A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed." He only lived to complete *Poet*, leaving the unfinished manuscript of *More Stately Mansions* which was published and produced after his death. The cycle plays begin in 19th century America, the time that shaped the drama O'Neill was to seize upon, modify and hurl forward.

Like transitional American dramatic realist and fellow Irish-American, James A. Herne (1839-1901), O'Neill founded his drama on an authenticity of place that shaped the characters therein. The world of the drama as described by O'Neill in *A Touch of the Poet* is one showing levels of physical and spiritual decay. The decay present within Melody's tavern and its inhabitants is one of revelation as much as it is of diminution. There is throughout a quality of life and light that can be read as hopeful. These sometimes highly contrasting inner and outer states of being are to be managed within a mode of presentation that assumes high levels of verisimilitude, though varying in degree within the course of the drama.

O'Neill leaves us with questions at the close of this drama — not because he intended to answer all of them in the next play in the cycle, but precisely because he believed the human condition to be always in a flux between bewilderment and wonder. He was adroit at asking questions, examining the conflict and showing the consequences of action — recognizing also, that choosing not to act can be, in itself, the most fateful of actions.

(Left) Lighting Designer Andy Sharp discusses color choices with Costume Designer Adele Cantor whose costume sketches appear in the foreground.

The color palette for the production was establishd by the director as those colors found in early color photographs (which were actually hand painted). Background tones are earthy (the set). Middleground and foreground tones (the actor in costume, in motion) are muted shades of true colors. Highlights of controlled intensity appear in some compositions — such as the O'Dowd/Roche/Rilley trio; Sara's copper hair (the actress' natural color); and Melody's red jacket from his days as a member of Wellington's Seventh Dragoons during the Peninsular Wars in Spain.

The set was designed to provide a framework for action using highly selective realism as the style, moving toward an almost formalistic structure. The mood for the environment is to be one of **wood**: brown tones, paneled walls; and **space**: high ceiling with exposed beams and open walls left and right with a solid wall upstage. Lighting controls the participation of the set — emphasizing the structure early and undergoing a progressive transformation as the drama moves to its climactic end.

(Left) Director Betty Jean Jones discusses production details with the Scenic Designer, Lang Reynolds.

Professor Henry Hood demonstrates proper carriage of the Scottish bagpipes.

Henry Hood, a professor at Guilford College noted for his piping and his knowledge of the art, was the bagpipes consultant for the production. He pointed out to the production team that the type of pipes O'Neill calls for in the script are really only available "in a museum in Dublin." O'Neill writes in a stage direction in Act III that Patch Riley (the piper in the play) is "accompanying himself on the pipes, his voice the quavering ghost of a tenor but still true." Hood noted that such pipes that allow the player to play and sing would be similar to Irish war pipes and he showed the production team a picture from Anthony Baines' *The Bagpipes*, a foremost source on pipes published by Oxford University Press in 1960. Scottish bagpipes are the type used for this production since they are most readily found and since they were, and still are, popular in Ireland and America during the period in which the play is set.

Eugene O'Neill's

A Touch of the Poet

Cast
(in order of appearance)

Mickey Maloy (barkeep) ..... Christopher Sugg
Jamie Cregan (Melody's cousin/war buddy) ..... Mark H. Creter
Sara Melody (Melody's daughter) ..... Brenda C. Eppley
Nora Melody (Melody's wife) ..... Maura E. Manning
Cornelius Melody (tavern owner) ..... Brent S. Laing**
Dan Roche ..... Hugh Hysell*
Paddy O'Dowd — bar regulars ..... Robert J. Craig
Patch Riley ..... John Edward Goodnow
Deborah (Mrs. Henry Harford) ..... Lorri Lindberg
Nicholas Gadsby (Harford's lawyer) ..... Jeff Kean

TIME: July 27, 1828
PLACE: Melody's Tavern, just outside Boston

SCENE SYNOPSIS

Act I: Dining room of Melody's tavern, morning.
Act II: The same, later that morning.

Intermission (12 minutes)

Act III: The same, that evening.

Intermission (12 minutes)

Act IV: The same, that night.

Produced by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

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* Denotes Member of Alpha Psi Omega, National Theatre Honorary Society
** In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree.

Production Staff

Technical Director ..... John Myers
Dramaturg ..... Karen Illingworth
Master Electrician ..... David Epley
Assistant Stage Manager ..... Phil Newsome
Literary Consultant to the Text ..... Dr. Ronald R. Miller
Oral Interpretation Coach ..... Sandra Foreman
Assistant to the Director ..... George W. Bellah III
Assistant to the Lighting Designer ..... Cricket Brendel
Hairstyles ..... Jennifer D'Arville
Costume Studio Supervisor ..... Tina Hantula
Costume Studio Graduate Assistants ..... Ida Bostian, Adele Cantor, Leigh Ann Palone
Costume Studio Undergraduate Assistants ..... Meg Johnson*, Hugh Hysell*, Vikki Griffin, Jennifer D'Arville, Angela Osborne, Cecelia Mallamo
Costume Construction Crew ..... Jonelle Black, Jeff Brown, Kristin Chapman, Barbara Ellis, Lauren Ellis, Cynthia Gamble, Tina Harrelson, Thomas Mauney, Nancy McBane, Sue McGirt, Cindy Patzau, Pearson, Kim Stinson
Scene Shop Supervisor ..... Martha Herbolich
Scene Shop Graduate Assistants ..... Scott Boyd, Cricket Brendel, Jeff Gillis, Brent Laing
Scene Shop Undergraduate Assistants ..... Thomas Mauney, Pearson, Andy Sharp, Lisa Sarvis, Eric Cranford
Scenery Construction Crew ..... Richard Allis, Bob Baumgardner, Cynthia Gamble, Todd Kelshaw, Kelly Masters, Joel Murray, Chris Strassner, Jeff Carroll, Cindy Patzau, Barbara Ellis, David McInnis, Shawn Searcy, Jonelle Black, William Cannon, Carmie Daily, Cecelia Mallamo, Sue McGirt, Lauren Ellis
Running Crew ..... John Ashton, Jonelle Black, Zina Boyd, Kristin Chapman, Amy Gilroy, Pearson

House Management provided by Alpha Psi Omega, National Theatre Honorary Society.

Special Acknowledgements

Steve Gilliam and Bob Cavin of UNCG Information Services
Dr. Henry Hood — Bagpipes Consultant
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University
WFMY TV, The Good Morning Show
Elk Productions of Greensboro
Frank O'Neill, The Carolinian
The Wayside Inn, Sudbury, Mass.
The Green Ball Tavern
Linda Gamble
Cindy Alexander

UNCG Community Forum On O'Neill

"*A Touch of the Poet:* Values, Character and Culture in the Drama of Eugene O'Neill"

November 8, 1987
6 pm
Taylor Building Theatre
(following the matinee performance of *A Touch of the Poet*)

Featuring

Ronald R. Miller, Ph.D.
Of Western Maryland College
O'Neill Scholar
Actor – Director – Dramaturg

Reception Immediately Following

Free and Open to the Public

Professor Miller's appearance made possible through a grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council, a state-based arm of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Project Assistant for the O'Neill Forum
Donna Hoover

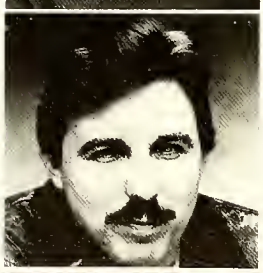
Artistic Staff

BETTY JEAN JONES (Director) is a theatre professor at UNCG where her special area of interest is reconciliation/synthesis of the directing performance mode with the history/theory/criticism mode. Her Ph.D. in American theatre and drama with a minor in film studies is from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Betty has directed three other productions for the UNCG Theatre mainstage: Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart*, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, and Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Her other directing credits include plays by Anouilh, Brecht, Sophocles, and Shakespeare. She maintains a continuing interest in plays of American stage realism.

LANG REYNOLDS (Scenic Designer) is the Director of Production and Lighting Designer for UNCG Theatre and a member of the Design Faculty. He serves as Co-Producer and Director of Production for the UNCG Summer Rep company and the Parkway Playhouse, a job which sometimes keeps him away from his first love — boating! Recent scene designs by Lang have included *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Two by Two*, and *A Chorus Line*. In 1986 he was awarded the Joseph Jefferson Citation for Set Design — 1987.

ADELE CANTOR (Costume Designer) is a second-year MFA candidate in costume design at UNCG. She holds a BA degree in Theatre Design and Technology from Lynchburg College. Adele's first costume design for an O'Neill play was *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. She has designed costumes for numerous other productions including *Barefoot in the Park* and *Annie*. She actively pursues an auxiliary interest and expertise in hair styling/design for the stage, and theatrical hair maintenance (wig as well as tips for the live actor!).

G. ANDERSON SHARP (Lighting Designer) is a senior in the BFA design program. He was the lighting designer for the UNCG production of *A Chorus Line* last year and has worked professionally with the North Carolina Shakespeare Company, The Music Theatre of Wichita, and UNCG Theatre's Summer Rep Company.



GEORGE W. BELLAH III (Assistant to the Director and Stage Manager) is a first year MFA graduate student in Directing at UNCG. In addition to holding a BFA in Acting from Northern Kentucky University, George is an Associate member of the Society of American Fight Directors. As an actor he has played Hotspur in *Henry IV, Part I*, Raul in *Extremities*, and George in *Of Mice and Men*. As a Fight Director he has choreographed fights for *Henry IV, Part I*, *Twelfth Night*, and the outdoor dramas *The Legend of Daniel Boone* and *Lincoln*.

PHIL NEWSOME (Assistant Stage Manager) returns to UNCG after his second season at *Viking!*, the outdoor drama in Minnesota where he appeared as the Viking leader Thorwald Mani. Phil is currently an MFA Directing candidate. He will direct his master production, *As Is* in the 1987-88 UNCG Studio Theatre series. He directed *The Code Breaker* for the UNCG Theatre for Young People series. Phil's UNCG acting credits include Boss Finley in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Sir in *The Dresser*, Captain Brackett in *South Pacific* for which he was an Irene Ryan acting nominee, and David Strickland in the premiere production of the new play *Mournin'*.

KAREN ILLINGWORTH (Dramaturg) is a 1986 UNCG graduate in the MA Theatre program. She was assistant director of the UNCG Theatre for Young People production of *Tales of Hans Christian Anderson*. She worked for the U.S. Army Music and Theatre Branch in Sagamihara, Japan before returning to graduate school. She has directed five mainstage productions including dinner theatre and founded the "Let's Tell a Story" series for children. Karen lives in Chapel Hill, N.C. and presently works as a freelance theatre research assistant/dramaturg.

The Company

CHRISTOPHER SUGG (Mickey Maloy) is a fourth year undergraduate theatre major. While at UNCG he has performed in *The Ice Wolf* with Theatre for Young People, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and just recently, *The Dining Room*. Chris is a native of Winston-Salem, N.C. and is also a songwriter and musician for "The Websters", a local band.

MARK H. CRETER (Jamie Cregan) is a second year MFA Acting student at UNCG. Mark took his undergraduate degree at Lynchburg College in Virginia where he appeared in *Arsenic and Old Lace, Deathtrap, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. At UNCG he has appeared in *A Flea in Her Ear* and the Summer Rep production of *The Foreigner* and *Two by Two*. Mark, originally from New Jersey, has also played roles at Parkway Playhouse and the outdoor drama *Blue Jacket*.

BRENDA C. EPPLEY (Sara Melody) is presently pursuing her MFA degree in Child Drama. She received her BFA in Theatre at West Virginia University, where she was nominated for a Fulbright Scholarship. She has attended the British-American Acting Academy in London and was recently nominated for the Winnifred Ward Scholarship for her contributions in Children's Theatre. Her acting credits include *The Trojan Women, The Taming of the Shrew*, and UNCG Theatre for Young People productions. This fall she will direct *The Honorable Urashimo Taro* for TYP as her Masters project.

MAURA E. MANNING (Nora Melody) has returned to school after many years to finish her BFA degree in Theatre. She moved here from Japan, where she worked in theatre and as manager of a coffee house. She has also performed with the San Jose Civic Light Opera, California Actors Theatre, and The Abbey Players of Dublin, Ireland. Maura is also the dialect coach for this production of O'Neill's *A Touch of the Poet*.

BRENT S. LAING (Cornelius Melody) is a second year MFA Acting major from Summerville, South Carolina. He received his BA in Theatre from the College of Charleston in 1984 where he appeared in lead roles for *Galileo, Our Town* and *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*. Greensboro audiences will remember Brent as James Leeds in the UNCG production of *Children of a Lesser God* and from the 1987 Summer Rep season.

HUGH HYSELL (Dan Roche) is a senior BFA student in Acting/Directing whose professional credits include: Daddy Warbucks in *Annie, Battle of Angels* with John Ritter, and the lead role in the outdoor drama, *The Sword of Peace*. His favorite role to date was as a strolling improvisational character at Busch Gardens. At UNCG Hugh has appeared in *MacBeth, Fools, A Flea in Her Ear*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Look for Hugh on PBS where he will play Mike Molar in a new dental health series.

ROBERT J. CRAIG (Paddy O'Dowd) marks his UNCG mainstage debut in this production of *A Touch of the Poet*. He is an MFA Acting student at UNCG. Rob received his BA degree from the University of Science and Art of Oklahoma where he appeared in *Oliver, The Shadow Box*, and *Our Town*. After graduation Rob plans to move to the west coast to pursue careers in acting and filmmaking.

JOHN EDWARD GOODNOW (Patch Riley) is a veteran Southern actor in his second year of the MFA program in Directing at UNCG. His previous acting credits include work at the Nashville Academy Theatre and the National Children's Theatre. His work in thirteen seasons of outdoor drama includes the premier of Paul Green's last opus, *The Lone Star* and the long running *Unto These Hills*. John holds a BS in Physics from Lenoir-Rhyne College.

LORRI LINDBERG (Deborah Harford) has returned to UNCG to complete her MFA in Acting this year. During her absence she has performed in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, The Rainmaker*, and *Same Time Next Year* at the Barn Dinner Theatre. Lorri will also be seen in the new film *Hiding Out*, which opens this fall. She is currently teaching Speech Composition and Voice and Articulation at UNCG. With her husband, Barry Bell, she runs Studio South, which provides actor training for stage and film.

JEFF KEAN (Nicholas Gadsby) is a second year MFA student in Directing at UNCG. He has returned to school after working as a professional scene designer and theatre manager in Ohio and Arizona. Jeff received his BA in Theatre and History from Wittenberg University in Ohio. At UNCG he has directed *Greater Tuna* and will be mounting a production of *Ubu 87* for his Master's project in February.

O'Neill and History

by Robert M. Calhoon, Ph.D.

Robert M. Calhoon is a history professor at the University of N.C.-Greensboro where he teaches in the History Department and the Residential College. His area of special interest and research is early American history. He is currently completing a book on early American evangelicals.

Eugene O'Neill had a deep and compelling insight into American history. Spanning the Progressive era and World War II, his playwriting embodied the values of progressives and liberals who believed that deep rooted changes in twentieth century life required of people the courage and realism to reform institutions and embrace new ideas. He drew characters, settings, and themes from his wide ranging reading of history. As his drama probed ever more deeply into the human condition and he operated at the cutting edge of creativity in American theater, O'Neill himself became a part of American cultural history — a role he seized with gripping intensity.

When he wrote his first plays in 1913-1914, O'Neill saw himself as one of a vanguard of artists — Theodore Dreiser was his idol — who would replace middle class sentimentality and contrived plots with the kind of material the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen was using — people who were victims of social and class conventions and were encountering their own psychic and sexual natures for the first time. In his first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon* (1918), he told the story of two New England brothers, one a stolid farmer and the other a poetic free spirit yearning to go to sea who fell in love with his brother's intended bride. The farmer went unhappily to sea, the poet stayed home and married, and all three had early, pitiful deaths.

By the time O'Neill wrote his masterpiece, *Desire Under the Elms*, in 1942, he had replaced that psychic determinism with a much deeper and darker view of human self-destructiveness. *Desire* was a story of Oedipal jealousy, incest, infanticide, and wild sexual bravado involving Ephraim Cabot, a tyrannical father and husband, and Eben and Abbie, his oppressed adult son and repressed young wife.

O'Neill was not content to lay bare the ordeals of misconceived human aspirations. That material raised for him the question of how human beings could deal honestly with their own star-crossed natures. In two of his last major plays, *The Iceman Cometh*, and the autobiographical *Long Day's Journey into Night*, both written between 1939 and 1941, he struggled with the possibility of transcending evil. While *Iceman* depicts death and murder among Skidrow derelicts, it really presents a moral hierarchy among those less and more aware of the killing qualities of human interaction. Human weakness is also two-edged in *Long Day's Journey*. "The only stable element" in the play, critic John N. Raleigh explains, "is the permanent love affair between James and Mary Tyrone," the characters based on O'Neill's parents, a bond "impervious to his penuriousness, nomadism, social isolation, and heavy drinking" and "to her dope addiction, continual complaints about the present, and persistent lament for her lost virginal, happy childhood."

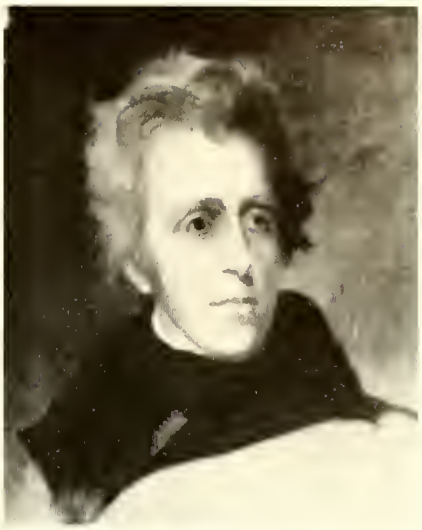
It was this ambition to see human character and American civilization as a whole that prompted O'Neill to undertake, toward the close of his career, a cycle of nine to eleven historical plays, "A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed," about an Anglo-Irish family in the United States from 1776 to 1932. Of the projected plays in the project, he completed only a major portion of *More Stately Mansions*, set in 1837-1842, and all of *A Touch of the Poet*, set in 1828. When illness in 1953 made further writing impossible, he destroyed the preliminary drafts of the unfinished plays lest after his death others attempt to complete them for him.

Significantly, *A Touch of the Poet*, the play with which he inaugurated the series, deals with the advent of Jacksonian democracy. That was surely the moment when Americans, secure in their possession of the land and free from cultural dependence on Europe, could examine their liberty and self-determination, their yearning for a place in history, and their awareness of what people in other circumstances had done before them.

Superficially, *Poet* perpetuated the view that Andrew Jackson led the American people out of subservience to aristocracy and into a freer, more democratic, more humane future. Realist that he was, O'Neill did not romanticize the Jacksonians, but he did accept several elements of the celebration of Old Hickory and his followers prevalent in the 1930s. He saw Jacksonian democracy as an authentic expression of the vitality of ordinary people. He employed Irish immigrants as perfect examples of the common people. Cregan and Maloy in the opening scene are not particularly sensitive or thoughtful individuals, but their honesty and disdain for social pretense are their redeeming qualities. It is easy to imagine them among the notorious crowd of laborers and backwoodsmen at Jackson's inaugural in 1829 who accepted the invitation to "the people" to take refreshments; finding the public rooms of the White House crowded, they climbed on the tables in their muddy boots and walked across the damask table cloth to get at the punch bowls and meat platters.

The action of the play occurs on July 27, 1828 during the election campaign between President John Quincy Adams (whose father, John Adams, had been President in the late 1790s) and the heroic and popular General Andrew Jackson. Early in the play, we hear the wife of an Irish-American tavern keeper, Cornelius Melody, berating him for supporting Adams and thereby offending less fortunate Irish immigrants who are staunch Jackson men.

John Quincy Adams
Engraving By John Wesley Paradise, ca. 1834



Andrew Jackson
From the original, owned by Mrs. Breckenridge Long of Laurel, Maryland. A conventionalization of this likeness of Jackson survives on the current twenty-dollar bill.

As the play proceeds, the upper crust followers of Adams provided O'Neill with the richest material for the exploration of social character. Frankly elitist, and identified with the "better sort" of wealthy, established, mercantile, urban families, Adams and his followers were proud, possessive, and articulate.

In O'Neill's brilliant insight, they were also filled with innocence, doubt, and guilt. They had not forgotten their grandparents' and parents' roles in winning independence from Britain, and they had read enough romantic and individualist literature and essays of their time to suspect that their civility had a corrupt underside.

All of these vulnerabilities surface in the unseen character of Simon Harford, scion of a distinguished New England family, who had gone off to live amid nature and write a book "denouncing greed and possessive ambition." The task of telling us about Simon falls not to his beloved — Cornelius Melody's headstrong daughter, Sara — but to Simon's mother, Deborah Harford.

In a revealing scene that is quintessential O'Neill, Deborah expounds to Sara about the philosophical and aesthetic impulses which drove enterprising, ambitious Americans — like her husband who succeeded and Cornelius who failed — to seek glory and success.

All of this would be a caricature of history in the hands of most angry dramatists of the 1930s. O'Neill's history was often askew. Scots Irish farmers and English stock artisans, far more often than Irish Catholic laborers, were politically conscious Jacksonians. Byron and Napoleon did not serve as folk heroes for very many American romantics.

But O'Neill's poetic license more often proves prophetic. The visiting French observer, Alexis de Tocqueville, noted that the effect of freedom and equality on an American was rootlessness, "a bootless chase of that complete felicity that forever eludes him." Behind John Quincy Adams's austere and severe portrait face was a tortured individual. John and Abigail Adams's children and grandchildren usually turned out to be either brilliant public figures or suicidal alcoholics. "I must study politics and war," John Adams — John Quincy's father — resolved, "so that my sons may have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture in order to give their children a right to study painting, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain." It was a heavy burden to lay on future generations. John's grandson and John Quincy's son, Charles Francis Adams, lamented a century later that "the history of my family is not a pleasant one to remember. It is one of great triumphs in the world but one of deep groans within, one of extraordinary brilliance and deep corroding mortification."

O'Neill understood this polarity of public brilliance and private mortification. He realized that it was inevitable in a society with a large middle class, a newly minted aristocracy, an environment of haunting natural splendor, a culture of romanticism, a faith in a benevolent past and a hopeful future all of which prevented people from working through their disillusionment except in painful moments of accidental self-discovery. "The Harford's never part with their dreams even when they deny them," Deborah Harford explains; "they cannot. That is the family curse."

For O'Neill it was the American curse.

The Fox and the Goose: A Musical Chase

by Karen Illingworth

Karen Illingworth recently completed her Masters degree in Drama at the University of N.C.-Greensboro. Her thesis investigated the truths and myths surrounding Eugene O'Neill's brief study at Harvard in George Pierce Baker's "47 Workshop" playwriting class in the fall of 1914.

Theatrical research for the most part is a difficult proposition. For one thing, the title of one who researches the background of the production, among other jobs, is the "dramaturg" or "dramaturge." It doesn't have the ring to it that "literary historian" has to it. Furthermore, it is not a title that is immediately identifiable when mentioned to someone who is not of the theatre. So it was as dramaturg that I undertook a recent adventure into this world of background information for O'Neill's *A Touch of the Poet*.

An immediate problem that needed to be conquered was the references that are made to the music played in the barroom on bagpipes. O'Neill in the script referred to two works, "Baltiorum" and "Modideroo."

A quick call to the music library at UNC-Chapel Hill left me confident that a simple stop would be all that was needed, because, as a librarian assured me, she has calls like mine all the time. When I entered the library I was greeted by two very pleasant individuals who, when I described my needs, snickered slightly then proceeded to tell me about the impossible task I had before me. The librarian who was kind enough to point out the general area of folk music issued an innocent but prophetic remark when he offered that the playwright rarely documents a tune and usually writes a lyric based on recall only. I decided that the best way to conquer the problem was to just start at the beginning of the Irish music and check the index of every book. That didn't seem like a bad idea except that books of early Irish music have no indices. In fact there is nothing more irritating to a researcher than a book without an index. What next?

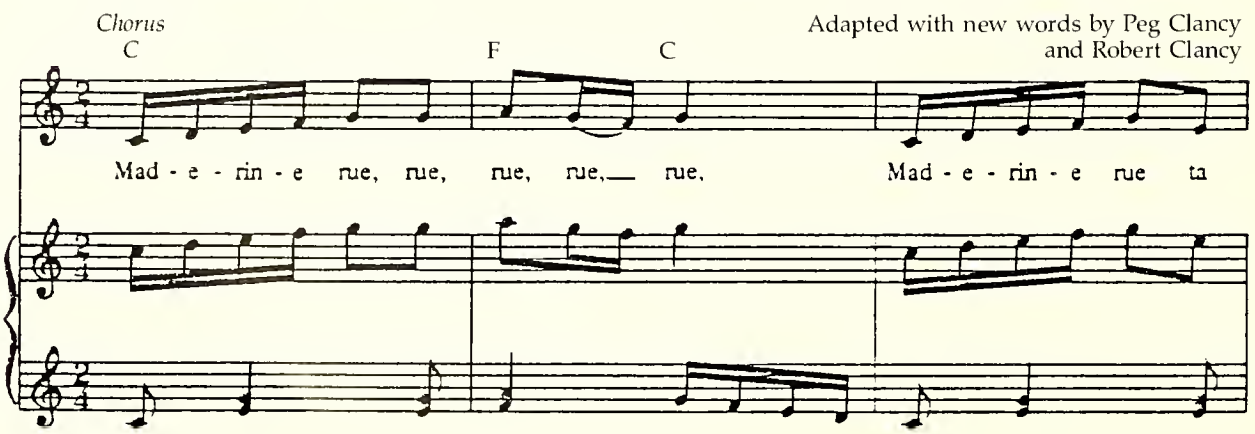
The only solution was to painstakingly pull each book and go from page to page looking for the titles involved. Luck was with me! The first book I pulled, right near the front, had something called "Baltighoran." O'Neill refers to the tune as "Baltiorum." This Irish song book noted at the beginning of the tune that the name has been alternately spelled (as O'Neill wrote it) and also referred me to another volume called Joyce's *Old Irish Folk Music*. When following up the referral, I found yet a third variant to the spelling, "Baltyoran," and a second version of the melody. It is such a completely different tune that "it can hardly be regarded as a version." *Bunting's Ancient Music of Ireland* points out that in *The English Dialect of Donegal*, the glossary refers to "Baltiorum" as a form of dance. The question that Bunting asks then, "is it a reel or a jig or a Baltiorum?" But at least I had a tune, or in this case, tunes, to present to the director.

The other tune I was asked to research was in O'Neill's words, ". . . a hunting song" . . . "Modideroo." This one I couldn't find anywhere. I was going back over the volumes of music when something just struck my blurry eyes. I was looking at a song called "Maderine Rue," screaming out at me from the page. Could this possibly be it? Underneath the title it had been carefully phonetically spelled for a reader (MAUDE-UH-REEN-UH-ROO). I glanced back at O'Neill's spelling and quickly deduced that America's greatest playwright, is not America's greatest speller! Furthermore, a brief note pointed out that this was an Irish hunting song symbolizing England as the fox and Ireland, the goose. I had my tunes and I had my titles and all it took was a day at the library thanks to a little Irish luck.

Maderine Rue

(MAUDE-UH-REEN-UH ROO)

Translated, this means "Little Red Fox." In this song England is the fox who devours the goose — Ireland.



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